

27<sup>th</sup> April 2017

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about sentencing for offences of animal cruelty.

I am pleased that we have a robust legal framework to tackle this vicious behaviour in the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal.

The law, and the penalties for breaking it, were reviewed by the Parliamentary Select Committee for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in 2012. At that time the Committee did not recommend increasing the maximum sentencing available to the courts. However, I am pleased to say that the previous cap on fines for animal abuse has been removed, and I can also tell you that the Ministry of Justice is now looking at whether there is a case for increasing the penalties further.

The courts must decide what the penalty should be for each individual case, taking into account its circumstances and the guidelines laid down by the Sentencing Council. There has recently been a public consultation into sentencing guidelines for these crimes, which resulted in the Council confirming the removal of the cap on the financial element of the penalty, and clarifying a range of relevant factors that would indicate a more serious offence.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me about this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



**Alok Sharma MP**